



# REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

## SPECIAL EDUCATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER PROGRAM

**CFDA Number: 84.324C**

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## **PART I GENERAL OVERVIEW**

### **1. REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

In this announcement, the Institute of Education Sciences (Institute) invites applications for research projects that will contribute to its Special Education Research and Development Center program. For the FY 2010 competition, the Institute will consider only applications that meet the requirements outlined below under Part II Special Education Research and Development Center Program and Part III Requirements of the Proposed Research.

Separate announcements are available on the Institute's website that pertain to the other research and research training grant programs funded through the Institute's National Center for Special Education Research and to the discretionary grant competitions funded through the Institute's National Center for Education Research (<http://ies.ed.gov/funding>).

## PART II

### SPECIAL EDUCATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER PROGRAM

#### **2. PURPOSE**

The Institute supports special education research and development centers (R&D Centers) that are intended to contribute significantly to the solution of special education problems in the United States by engaging in research, development, evaluation, and national leadership activities aimed at improving the education system, and ultimately, student achievement. Each of the R&D Centers conducts a focused program of research in its topic area. In addition, each Center conducts supplemental research within its broad topic area and provides national leadership in advancing evidence-based practice and policy within its topic area. For information on existing Institute special education R&D Centers, please see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncser/projects/program.asp?ProgID=52>.

For the FY2010 Special Education Research and Development Center competition, the Institute invites applications for two Special Education Research and Development Centers: (1) **Special Education Research and Development Center on Assessment and Accountability** and (2) **Special Education Research and Development Center on Improving Mathematics Instruction for Students with Mathematics Difficulties**.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

The Institute's R&D Centers grapple with key education issues that face our nation. Through the Institute's R&D Center program, researchers have greater resources to tackle more complex education problems, create innovative education solutions, and contribute to knowledge and theory in special education. The Institute currently funds 2 special education R&D centers through the National Center for Special Education Research and 13 national R&D centers through the National Center for Education Research. Here are examples of the types of issues that they are addressing.

- Young children who have not had sufficient language and early literacy experiences prior to kindergarten face significant challenges learning to read. These children often continue to experience poor reading skills throughout school. The *Center for Response to Intervention in Early Childhood* is creating a Response to Intervention model including innovative interventions to promote the development of language and early literacy skills and an assessment system for tracking children's progress.
- Educators and policymakers argue that major impediments to increasing college enrollment among low-income students are the complexity of the federal application process for financial aid and the lack of information that families have about financial aid. The *National Center for Postsecondary Research* is testing interventions to determine which combination of services, including direct assistance with completing the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) application process, will improve access to postsecondary education for low-income students.
- School districts are experimenting with the use of incentives for teachers, administrators, and schools to improve the quality of education in their schools. How should performance incentive programs be structured to achieve desired goals and minimize unintended negative consequences? The *National Center for Teacher Performance Incentives* is conducting a number of studies to test the effects of different parameters for incentive programs.
- For the past several decades, students with emotional and behavioral disorders have had the poorest educational, behavioral, and social post-school outcomes of any disability group, yet very little research exists to inform practice with this population of high school age students. The *Center on Serious Behavior Disorders at the Secondary Level* is

developing and evaluating a comprehensive package of interventions to improve outcomes for students through enhancing school and teacher capacity, building youth competence, and increasing family and community supports

- Despite advances in education technology, many argue that the full potential of electronic media for educational purposes has yet to be reached. Typical products are not ones that students would naturally gravitate to outside of school — lacking high quality graphics and sounds, sophisticated user interface, a reward structure that cultivates a strong sense of motivation, and engaging activities that maintain the user's attention. The Institute is currently funding two R&D centers in education technology. The centers are capitalizing on rich multimedia gaming environments to create innovative instructional products: one center is focusing on teaching mathematics to ninth graders and the other is addressing science content for seventh graders.
- The recent development of state longitudinal data systems offers the opportunity to answer a multitude of education policy-relevant questions, but requires sophisticated methodological expertise to handle complicated datasets and complex analyses. *The Center for the Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research* (CALDER) brings together a group of economists with such expertise to take advantage of comprehensive education databases in Florida, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Texas and Washington state to examine the relations between teacher workforce and governance policies (e.g., certification, compensation, accountability, and choice) and key education outcomes (e.g., student achievement, graduation rates, teacher retention).

For its FY 2010 R&D Center competition, the Institute is interested in applications that offer the greatest promise for (1) contributing to the solution of a specific special education problem within the R&D Center topic described below and to the generation of new knowledge and theories relevant to the focus of the R&D Center, (2) providing relatively rapid research and scholarship on supplemental questions that emerge within the R&D Center's topic area and that are not being addressed adequately elsewhere, and (3) providing national leadership within the R&D Center's topic by developing position papers, hosting meetings, and engaging in dialogue with researchers and practitioners in order to identify promising areas of research, development, and dissemination for the field and to advance evidence-based policy and practice.

## **PART III REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH**

### **4. TOPIC ONE: REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER ON ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

For well over a decade, there has been an increased demand for accountability in education focused on improved student academic performance. This focus on academic achievement has resulted in a shift in accountability models in special education from one that emphasized compliance with policies and procedures set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), to one that focuses on measuring student outcomes in order to gauge the quality of academic programming provided to students with disabilities (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003).

This emphasis on holding schools accountable for academic outcomes is intended to lead to improved student performance, but this had not necessarily been realized for students in special education. Overall, students with disabilities continue to lag significantly behind their peers without disabilities. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that in 2005, only five percent of high school seniors with disabilities performed at or above the proficient level on the NAEP reading assessment.

Holding schools accountable for the achievement of students with disabilities has led to much discussion on the most appropriate ways to measure the achievement of students with disabilities (e.g., accommodations in test taking conditions, alternate standards). At minimum, however, to raise academic achievement for students with disabilities, schools need data that will accurately measure individual student progress from year to year and some means to gauge whether or not individual students are making reasonable progress. Understanding the yearly progress made by students will provide teachers and schools with information necessary to make important instructional and programmatic decisions for students with disabilities.

Measuring progress for students with disabilities raises many questions about what is expected for their achievement over the course of a year. The recent emphasis on accountability has raised expectations for the performance of students with disabilities to achieve the same academic standards as their peers without disabilities. It could also be argued however, that by nature of having a disability, students with disabilities cannot be expected to learn at the same rate as their peers without disabilities. Questions remain as to what progress can be expected within a specified time frame. For example, how much growth can be expected in one year for students with different types of disabilities? Should we expect growth patterns for students with disabilities similar to typical growth for their peers without disabilities? Do patterns of growth differ by type and severity of disability? If growth patterns for students with some types of disabilities differ from students without disabilities, then we need information on how best to aggregate data at the classroom and building-level for accountability purposes.

The field has not, however, reached consensus in determining the best method for measuring academic progress over time. A common model used to measure student progress has been a status model, which measures student performance in the aggregate at the end of one year, and compares those results with scores from the prior year. These assessments tell us how schools and districts are performing systemically based on some external criteria of proficiency, but do not tell us about the general progress or rate of growth of students in that group. As a whole, results may show that students with disabilities are not performing well or not meeting proficiency, but results are not able to show whether students with disabilities made any significant growth in skills over the past year. Furthermore, students with disabilities, as do all students, enter the school year with great disparity in skills and knowledge so aggregating scores does not allow schools to pinpoint which students are having the most difficulty improving academically.



One promising method proposed to measure student performance is the use of growth or value-added models. Growth models allow schools to assess each individual student's progress and allow a comparison of each student's progress against his/her own achievements from the prior year, as well as compare each student's rate of growth to those of other students. Properly designed growth model assessments have the potential to allow teachers and schools to see more clearly whether schools are working to address the needs of individual students with disabilities.

Currently there is no consensus on the most appropriate growth model to use to assess student progress or school performance. The proposed models range from relatively straightforward fixed effects models to relatively complex and general multivariate, longitudinal mixed-models (e.g., McCaffrey et al., 2004; Tekwe et al., 2004). In addition, for growth models to be used by schools, they need to be simple enough to understand and interpret, but still accurately capture individual student progress. Relatively little research has been done to date comparing various growth models. However, at least one team of researchers has compared various complexities of models and found that there was little or no benefit to using the more complex growth model to capture student progress, but students who were enrolled in special education programs were excluded from all analyses (Tekwe et al., 2004).

Researchers have also raised numerous questions about the use of growth models to measure student progress. For example, technical questions remain as to whether and how to include covariates in the models, and whether teacher or schools should be treated as fixed or random effects. Growth models of student performance will often have missing data because not all students will have data available for all time points tested, and there is yet no commonly accepted method for handling missing data, or determining how much missing data is acceptable before it compromises validity of the procedure.

In addition, some researchers have argued that vertical scaling of tests, a method to link a set of test forms of increasing difficulty, should occur to facilitate the tracking of growth over time. Although not required to conduct a growth model, use of vertical scaling has the potential to enrich the interpretations of test scores and growth trajectories of students by providing a systematic way to examine performance across grade spans (Patz, 2007). Questions remain as to the most valid approach to this analysis, as well as the necessity of this procedure for growth models that measure academic performance of students.

To address these issues, the Institute is establishing a Special Education Research and Development Center on Assessment and Accountability (Special Education Assessment/Accountability Center). The focus of the Special Education Assessment/Accountability Center is on conducting a program of research that identifies the academic growth trajectories of students with disabilities, and develops and tests practically relevant methods of accurately measuring academic growth for students with disabilities to be used in accountability systems. *The ultimate objective of such work would be to develop assessment methods that schools can use to (1) accurately assess the academic progress of students with disabilities and (2) improve the quality of education provided to students with disabilities to lead to improved student outcomes.*

In addition to its focused program of research on assessing growth for students with disabilities, the Assessment and Accountability Center will conduct supplementary studies and engage in national leadership activities relevant to assessment of students with disabilities.

#### **A. Significance of the Focused Program of Research**

For its focused program of research, the Special Education Assessment/Accountability Center is required (a) to conduct research on the natural developmental progress in achievement by students with disabilities and (b) to develop and test various approaches for measuring growth for students with disabilities intended for use by school systems for accountability purposes.

## **B. Research Plan for the Focused Program of Research**

### **a. Methodological requirements**

#### **(i) Research plan.**

Applicants should describe their research plan clearly and in sufficient detail for reviewers to understand what the applicants are proposing to undertake and to judge the degree to which following the plan will yield answers to the posed hypotheses or research questions. The research plans should provide evidence that the applicant anticipates and has alternative approaches if difficulties are encountered.

For work involving secondary data analyses, applicants should describe clearly the database(s) to be used in the investigation including information on sampling design, sample characteristics, variables to be used, structure of the database, and ability to ensure access to the database if the applicant does not already have access to it. The database should be described in sufficient detail to allow reviewers to be able to judge whether or not the proposed analyses may be conducted with the database. If multiple databases will be linked to conduct analyses, applicants should provide sufficient detail for reviewers to be able to judge the feasibility of the plan.

Applicants may propose to collect original data. The applicant should carefully describe the sample (including inclusion/exclusion criteria), measures (including reliability and validity), and procedures proposed for the data collection.

#### **(ii) Access to data.**

Applicants proposing secondary data analyses must provide sufficient documentation (e.g., letters of agreement) to assure reviewers that they already have access to the data or that access can be obtained and the project can be carried out in a timely fashion.

#### **(iii) Data analysis.**

The applicant must include detailed descriptions of data analysis procedures. Data analytic plans must have sufficient detail to permit reviewers to judge the appropriateness and adequacy of the plan for addressing the hypotheses or research questions. Where analyses of existing or new datasets are included, strong applications will include an explicit discussion of how exclusion from testing, or missing data, will be handled within the statistical analyses.

## **5. TOPIC TWO: REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER ON IMPROVING MATHEMATICS INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS WITH MATHEMATICS DIFFICULTIES**

In the last ten years, there has been a substantial increase in knowledge on the cognitive underpinnings of learning difficulties in mathematics (e.g., Berch & Mazzocco, 2007; Geary, 2004). Scientific advances have been achieved in part from the application of cognitive theory and experimental methods to understanding cognitive processing in individuals who have learning difficulties in mathematics (Geary 2005). For example, one well-documented limitation for children with mathematics difficulties is acquiring basic mathematics facts (e.g., Geary et al., 2007; Gersten, Jordan, & Flojo, 2005). A second finding is that children with mathematics difficulties struggle to retrieve mathematics facts. Exploration of underlying cognitive processes indicates that children with mathematics difficulties do not perform as well as their same age peers without mathematics difficulties on working memory tasks (e.g., Geary et al., 2007; Swanson & Jerman, 2006). Despite these advances in our understanding of the functioning of cognitive processes underlying mathematics difficulties, relatively little work has been done to capitalize on this research and develop innovative strategies for improving mathematics instruction for students who struggle to learn mathematics – in particular, for students with learning disabilities in mathematics or who are at risk for developing learning disabilities in mathematics.

The Institute recognizes that proficiency in mathematics is critical for furthering one's education and achieving success in the workplace and that improving mathematics outcomes requires a substantial research investment. Through its special education research programs in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education, Mathematics and Science Education, Cognition and Student Learning in Special Education, Teacher Quality, and Related Services, the Institute supports research on the development and evaluation of mathematics curricula, instructional approaches for teaching mathematics, mathematics assessments, and professional development programs for teachers and related services providers that are intended to improve mathematics outcomes. Through its Special Education Policy, Finance, and Systems research program, the Institute invests in research on the policies and systemic reform that may lead to overall improvement in education for students with disabilities. Each of these programs supports research to address the instructional needs of individuals with low-incidence, as well as high-incidence disabilities.

To complement its existing research programs that address mathematics education, the Institute is establishing a Special Education Research and Development Center on Improving Mathematics Instruction for Students with Mathematics Difficulties (Special Education Math Center). This center will conduct a focused program of research that utilizes cognitive science to develop innovative approaches to improving instruction for students with learning difficulties in mathematics. Innovative approaches for improving instruction may involve instructional strategies to be implemented by teachers, instruction delivered through adaptive computerized tutoring, or instruction delivered through other innovative approaches but must be designed to be implemented in authentic education delivery settings (e.g., schools). The focused program of research is also intended to extend scientific knowledge of the underlying cognitive processes that contribute to learning difficulties in mathematics in order to identify new approaches for intervening and providing more effective instruction for students with learning difficulties in mathematics.

The Institute recognizes that the field has not yet reached consensus on criteria for identifying students with learning disabilities in mathematics. The special education field is moving toward Response to Intervention approaches in order to distinguish between those who are low performers in mathematics as a result of poor instruction and those who struggle in mathematics for other reasons. Cognitive researchers have typically used cutoff points for scores on mathematics achievement tests that either included a wide range of abilities (e.g., < 30th percentile) or a more restrictive range (e.g., < 10th percentile). Using cutoff points, researchers have found differences in cognitive functioning between students who are at the higher end of this range and students who are at the lower end of this range (e.g., Geary et al., 2007). For the purpose of this competition, the Institute requests applications that include students across a reasonably broad range of low performance in mathematics and ensure sufficient numbers to make comparisons between students at the higher end of low performance in mathematics and students at the lower end of the range.

In addition to its focused program of research on improving mathematics instruction for students with mathematics difficulties, the Special Education Math Center will conduct supplementary studies and engage in national leadership activities relevant to improving mathematics achievement for students with mathematics difficulties.

#### **A. Significance of the Focused Program of Research**

For its focused program of research, the Special Education Math Center is required (a) to explore underlying cognitive processes that impede mathematics performance in students with mathematics difficulties for the purpose of identifying possible targets for intervention and (b) to develop and test innovative instructional approaches or other interventions for students with mathematics difficulties that utilize cognitive research on mathematics disabilities and mathematics processing. By (1) clearly identifying the students who will be the target of the new instructional approaches or interventions, (2) describing the instructional approaches or interventions to be developed and tested, and (3) providing a

compelling theoretical and empirical rationale for the entire focused program of research, applicants are addressing the *significance of the focused program of research*.

**a. Identification of students with mathematics difficulties**

Applicants must describe and justify the criteria that will be used to identify students with mathematics difficulties. The Institute expects that the approaches or interventions to be developed target students who have learning disabilities in mathematics or are at risk for developing learning disabilities in mathematics and who are in any grades from preschool through Grade 12. As stated above, the Institute requests applications that include students across a reasonably broad range of low performance in mathematics and ensure sufficient numbers to make comparisons between students at the higher end of low performance in mathematics and students at the lower end of the range.

**b. Rationale for cognitive processes to be explored**

Applicants must propose to conduct studies intended to extend our knowledge of the underlying cognitive processes that inhibit or constrain mathematics performance in students with mathematics difficulties. Applicants should clearly describe the theoretical and empirical rationale for studies designed to explore underlying cognitive processes of learning difficulties in mathematics and identify possible targets for intervention. The rationale should include a discussion of how this new knowledge of the underlying cognitive processes could inform the development of innovative instructional approaches or interventions.

**c. Rationale for innovative instructional approaches that will be developed**

The Institute is requesting proposals in which researchers apply *current* knowledge about cognitive processes underlying mathematical performance to develop instructional approaches or other interventions designed to improve mathematics performance for students with learning difficulties in mathematics, as well as interventions based on the exploratory research that the Center conducts. The instructional approaches or intervention to be developed must be designed to be implemented in authentic education delivery settings (e.g., classrooms). The instructional approaches or intervention may be implemented by classroom teachers, delivered by school specialists, incorporate adaptive computerized tutoring, or use other school-based delivery mechanisms.

In order for reviewers to assess applicants' capacity to carry out the research to develop new interventions, applicants should provide an example of how they would conduct such research based on existing knowledge about cognitive processes that underlie mathematics performance for students with learning difficulties in mathematics. Applicants should describe the instructional approach or intervention to be developed. Applicants should provide a strong theoretical and empirical justification for the design of the intervention.

**B. Research Plan for the Focused Program of Research**

**a. Methodological requirements for exploring the underlying cognitive processes that impede mathematics performance**

For the Special Education Math Center, applicants should propose to conduct a series of studies designed to explore the cognitive processes underlying the mathematics performance of students with mathematics difficulties. Such studies might include, for example, short-term longitudinal studies in which the objective is to identify the component processes and skills that are (a) highly correlated with mathematics proficiency in academic settings, and (b) can be improved, accelerated, or advanced through instruction. The researcher should make explicit the hypothesized link between the underlying cognitive process and improving academic achievement. Another approach to these exploratory questions projects is to begin by identifying a constellation of observed behaviors indicating mathematics difficulties, and then propose a research plan to systematically explore possible causal explanations for that problem.

Strong applications will clearly specify the design of the exploratory studies. The Institute expects that the results of these studies will extend scientific knowledge on the underlying cognitive processes that impede mathematics performance in students with mathematics difficulties.

**b. Methodological requirements for developing innovative instructional approaches**

For the Special Education Math Center, applicants must propose to conduct a series of studies to develop innovative instructional approaches or interventions for improving instruction for students with mathematics difficulties. The Institute recognizes that detailing all of the studies in the series may not be possible, particularly when later experiments depend on the results of earlier experiments in the series. However, applicants must provide sufficient detail for reviewers to judge the quality of the proposed program of research. Applicants may, for example, describe the overall approach of the focused program of research and provide specific details for two or three exemplar studies.

Strong applications will include clear descriptions of: (1) the characteristics of students who will participate in the studies; (2) the procedures for developing the instructional approaches or intervention; and (3) the research design and procedures (including measures, and procedures for collecting and analyzing data) for determining if the instructional approaches or intervention function as intended. It is helpful if applicants explain: (a) how they define "operating as intended" for the proposed instructional approaches or intervention; (b) what data they will collect to determine how the instructional approaches or intervention are operating; (c) how they will use the data they collect to make further revisions to the instructional approaches or intervention; and (d) what criteria they will use to determine if the instructional approaches or intervention operate as intended.

Applicants should propose studies that address the feasibility of implementing the instructional approaches or intervention in authentic education delivery settings and the promise of the intervention for achieving the intended outcomes. Feasibility should be demonstrated on a small sample of users (e.g., teachers, students) who are like those for whom the intervention is intended and should show that they can utilize or implement the intervention in the way that the researchers intend the intervention to be implemented. The promise of the intervention for achieving the intended outcomes can be demonstrated through small experimental or quasi-experimental studies.

**c. Timeline**

Applicants should include a timeline that makes clear when research activities will be conducted. For example, researchers should make clear when exploratory studies will be conducted and when development activities will occur. Applicants should make clear how results from exploratory studies feed into development activities.

**6. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH**

**A. Basic Requirements**

**a. Applying to multiple competitions or topics**

Applicants may submit proposals to more than one of the Institute's FY 2010 competitions or topics. In addition, within a particular competition, applicants may submit multiple proposals. However, applicants may submit a given proposal only once (i.e., applicants may not submit the same proposal or very similar proposals to multiple competitions or topics). If the Institute determines prior to panel review that an applicant has submitted the same proposal or very similar proposals to multiple topics or competitions and the proposal is judged to be compliant and responsive to the submission rules and requirements described in the Request for Applications, the Institute will select one version of the application to be reviewed by the appropriate scientific review panel. If the Institute determines after panel review that an applicant has submitted the same proposal or very similar proposals to multiple research topics or competitions and if the proposal is determined to be worthy of funding, the Institute will select the research program under which the proposal will be funded.

**b. Applying to a particular topic**

To submit an application to the Institute's Special Education Research and Development Center grant program, applicants must choose the specific topic under which they are applying. Each topic has specific requirements. The Institute strongly advises potential applicants to contact the relevant program officer listed in Section 22 if they have any questions regarding the appropriateness of a particular project for submission under a specific Center topic.

For the FY 2010 Center competition, applicants must apply *either* under Topic One (Special Education R&D Center on Assessment and Accountability) *or* Topic Two (Special Education R&D Center on Improving Mathematics Instruction for Students with Mathematics Difficulties).

**B. Requirements for the Focused Program of Research**

The Institute intends for the work of the R&D Centers to include a focused program of research that ideally will result in solutions or answers to specific special education problems at the end of 5 years. The Institute expects the *focused program of research* to comprise about 50 to 75 percent of a Center's activities depending on the cost and effort required to carry out the focused program of research.

For the FY 2010 R&D Center competition, the Institute expects applicants to propose a focused program of research that consists of a set of tightly linked studies that build on each other and together accomplish the goals specified under the Specific Requirements section for each Center topic. The Institute strongly discourages applications that propose a model in which multiple investigators each conduct separate studies that are only loosely coordinated around the topic.

Although the Centers have much broader functions than conducting a focused program of research, the research program is the only portion of the activities of a Center that can be well-specified in advance, and thus can provide a fair basis for comparing and evaluating applications for funding. Consequently, the majority of the application should be a detailed description of the focused program of research.

**a. Significance of the focused program of research**

Because review panels typically read applications across a number research programs, it is most helpful if in the first sentence of the project narrative, the applicant identifies the research program to which the application has been submitted (e.g., "This is an application for a Special Education R&D Center on Assessment and Accountability.").

The rationale for the significance of the focused program of research must address specific requirements detailed in Part III, Section 4.A for the Special Education R&D Center on Assessment and Accountability or in Part III, Section 5.A for the Special Education R&D Center on Improving Mathematics Instruction for Students with Mathematics Difficulties.

**b. Research plan for the focused program of research**

The most important consideration in the competitive review of proposals will be the applicant's articulation of the focused program of research. Applications must include well-specified objectives, a detailed research methods and data analysis plan, a plan for coordinating the work of the cooperating scientists, a timetable for accomplishing the research, and the specific outcomes of the program of research.

The methodological requirements for the focused program of research are detailed in Part III, Section 4.B for the Special Education R&D Center on Assessment and Accountability or in Part III, Section 5.B for the Special Education R&D Center on Improving Mathematics Instruction for Students with Mathematics Difficulties.

**c. Timeline**

Along with the description of the focused program of research, applicants should include a clear timeline for the activities in their focused program of research. (The timeline may be included in Appendix A.)

**C. Requirements for Other Center Activities**

**a. Requirements for supplemental research projects**

As part of the Center activities, applicants are expected to conduct smaller, quick-response research projects that speak to other issues that are important within the context of the broad topic of the Center. These projects are typically ones that can be completed within 9 to 12 months. Because these studies are expected to be completed in a relatively short period, typical supplemental studies involve secondary analyses of longitudinal data sets.

Because the Center will work cooperatively with the Institute to select and design supplemental studies to respond to pressing policy and practice needs within the topic covered by the Center, the Institute does not expect applicants to provide highly detailed research plans for these studies in the application. **The Institute expects applicants to devote no more than two or three paragraphs to the description of each supplemental study.** The applicant should, however, document capacity to conduct such studies (e.g., knowledge of the field and research experience of key personnel) and provide **two** examples of supplemental studies the applicant believes might be useful to undertake, including a short rationale explaining the need for the proposed study and a short description of the type of research approach that would be used. Applicants should bear in mind that, although this section of the proposal does not need to be long, capacity for conducting quick response research projects will carry weight in the scoring of the application.

**b. Requirements for national leadership activities**

As part of the Center activities, applicants are expected to provide national leadership within the Center's topic area by developing position papers, hosting meetings, and engaging in dialogue with researchers and practitioners to identify promising areas of research, development, and dissemination for the field.

Because the Center will work cooperatively with the Institute in the development and planning of such activities, the Institute does not expect applicants to provide highly detailed plans for the leadership activities. It is sufficient to provide information on why the proposed Center staff are qualified to fulfill this leadership role if awarded a Center, as well as two examples of the types of activities the applicant believes might be useful to undertake, including a short rationale justifying the need for the proposed activity and a description of the applicant's capacity for conducting such projects. Although this section of the application does not need to be long, applicants should bear in mind that capacity for carrying out national leadership activities will carry weight in the scoring of the application.

**D. Management and Institutional Resources**

The Institute anticipates that the focused program of research, as well as the supplemental studies, and national leadership activities will require the coordination of multiple scientists and other partners. Applicants should describe plans and procedures for the overall management of the Center. These plans should include details of procedures for coordinating with schools and districts or other education delivery settings involved in the projects of the Center.

Competitive applicants will have access to institutional resources that adequately support research activities and access to schools or other education delivery settings in which to conduct the research.

When the proposed focused program of research includes conducting research activities in schools, applicants should document that they have the capacity and experience to obtain such cooperation and to describe the steps they have taken or will take to obtain it. If the plans for the **first year** of grant activities include substantial work to be conducted in schools or other education delivery settings, strong

applications will include documentation of the availability and cooperation of the schools or other education delivery settings that will be required to carry out that work via a letter of support from the education organization(s).

An applicant may involve curriculum or assessment developers or distributors (*including for-profit entities*) in the project, from having the developers as full partners in its proposal to using off-the-shelf materials without involvement of the developer or publisher. However, involvement of the developer or distributor must not jeopardize the objectivity of the research. Strong applications will carefully describe the role, if any, of the developer/distributor in the project. Applicants should describe how objectivity in the research would be maintained.

#### **E. Personnel**

Competitive applicants to the Special Education R&D Center on Assessment and Accountability will have leadership and staff that collectively demonstrate (a) expertise in measurement and testing, (b) expertise in development and application of growth models, (c) expertise in measurement of achievement of students with disabilities, and (d) experience that is relevant to national leadership activities.

Competitive applicants to the Special Education R&D Center on Improving Mathematics Instruction for Students with Mathematics Difficulties will have leadership and staff that collectively demonstrate (a) expertise in learning mathematics content (e.g., cognitive psychology or cognitive development), mathematics difficulties, and mathematics instruction; (b) the methodological expertise to carry out the proposed projects; (c) sufficient experience working with education delivery settings to carry out the proposed projects; and (d) experience that is relevant to national leadership activities.



## **PART IV GENERAL SUBMISSION AND REVIEW INFORMATION**

### **7. MECHANISM OF SUPPORT**

The Institute intends to award cooperative agreements pursuant to this request for applications. The maximum award length is five years.

### **8. FUNDING AVAILABLE**

Typical awards will be in the range of \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 (total cost = direct + indirect) per year for 5 years. Larger awards will be considered; the size of the award depends on the scope of the activities.

The Institute expects the *focused program of research* to comprise about 50 to 75 percent of a Center's activities depending on the cost and effort required to carry out the focused program of research, with the remainder of the budget devoted to supplemental studies, leadership activities, and any administrative activities not included in the focused program of research.

Although the plans of the Institute include the Special Education Research and Development Center program, awards pursuant to this request for applications are contingent upon the availability of funds and the receipt of a sufficient number of meritorious applications. The Institute anticipates funding at least one Center under each topic. However, because the Institute is committed to funding only high quality work, the Institute will make an award for a Center only if at least one application is deemed meritorious under peer review.

### **9. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

Applicants that have the ability and capacity to conduct scientifically valid research are eligible to apply. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to, non-profit and for-profit organizations and public and private agencies and institutions, such as colleges and universities.

### **10. SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS**

Research supported through this program must be relevant to U.S. schools.

Recipients of awards are expected to publish or otherwise make publicly available the results of the work supported through this program. Institute-funded investigators should submit final, peer-reviewed manuscripts resulting from research supported in whole or in part by the Institute to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, <http://eric.ed.gov>) upon acceptance for publication. An author's final manuscript is defined as the final version accepted for journal publication, and includes all graphics and supplemental materials that are associated with the article. The Institute will make the manuscript available to the public through ERIC no later than 12 months after the official date of publication. Institutions and investigators are responsible for ensuring that any publishing or copyright agreements concerning submitted articles fully comply with this requirement.

Applicants must budget for one meeting each year in Washington, D.C., with other grantees and Institute staff for a duration of up to three days of meetings. At least one center representative must attend the three-day meeting.

Research applicants may collaborate with, or be, for-profit entities that develop, distribute, or otherwise market products or services that can be used as interventions or components of interventions in the proposed research activities. Involvement of the developer or distributor must not jeopardize the objectivity of the evaluation.

Applicants may propose studies that piggyback onto an existing study (i.e., requires access to subjects and data from another study). In such cases, the principal investigator of the existing study must be one of the members of the research team applying for the grant to conduct the new project.

The Institute strongly advises applicants to establish a written agreement among all key collaborators and their institutions (e.g., principal and co-principal investigators) regarding roles, responsibilities, access to data, publication rights, and decision-making procedures within three months of receipt of an award.

Through the terms of the cooperative agreement, grantees will work with the Institute to plan activities related to supplemental research and leadership activities.

#### **11. DESIGNATION OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

The applicant institution is responsible for identifying the Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator is the individual who has the authority and responsibility for the proper conduct of the research, including the appropriate use of federal funds and the submission of required scientific progress reports. An applicant institution may elect to designate more than one principal investigator. In so doing, the applicant institution identifies them as individuals who share the authority and responsibility for leading and directing the research center intellectually and logistically. All principal investigators will be listed on any grant award notification. However, institutions applying for funding must designate a single point of contact for the center. The role of this person is primarily for communication purposes on the scientific and related budgetary aspects of the center and should be listed as the Principal Investigator. All other principal investigators should be listed as Co-Principal Investigators.

#### **12. LETTER OF INTENT**

The Institute asks all applicants to submit a Letter of Intent by 4:30 p.m. Washington D.C. time on the relevant due date for the competition to which they plan to submit. The information in the Letters of Intent enable Institute staff to identify the expertise needed for the scientific peer review panels and secure sufficient reviewers to handle the anticipated number of applications. The Institute encourages all interested applicants to submit a Letter of Intent, even if they think that they might later decide not to submit an application. The letter of intent is not binding and does not enter into the review of a subsequent application.

The letter of intent form must be submitted electronically using the instructions provided at: <https://ies.constellagroup.com>. Receipt of the letter of intent will be acknowledged via email.

#### **A. Content**

The letter of intent should include:

- a. Descriptive title
- b. Center topic to which the applicant intends to submit a proposal
- c. Brief description of the proposed focused program of research
- d. Name, institutional affiliation, address, telephone number and e-mail address of the principal investigator(s)
- e. Name and institutional affiliation of any key Center personnel, including collaborators and contractors
- f. Duration of the proposed project
- g. Estimated total budget request (The estimate need only be a rough approximation.)

#### **B. Format and Page Limitation**

Fields are provided in the letter of intent form for each of the content areas described above. The project description should be single-spaced and should not exceed one page (about 3,500 characters).

#### **13. MANDATORY SUBMISSION OF ELECTRONIC APPLICATIONS**

Grant applications must be submitted electronically through the Internet using the software provided on the Grants.gov Web site: <http://www.grants.gov/>. Applicants must follow the application procedures and submission requirements described in the Institute's Grants.gov Application Submission Guide and the instructions in the User Guide provided by Grants.gov.

Applications submitted in paper format will be rejected unless the applicant (a) qualifies for one of the allowable exceptions to the electronic submission requirement described in the Federal Register notice announcing the Special Education Research and Development Center Program (CFDA Number 84.324C) competitions described in this Request for Applications and (b) submits, no later than two weeks before the application deadline date, a written statement to the Institute that documents that the applicant qualifies for one of these exceptions.

For more information on using Grants.gov, applicants should visit the Grants.gov web site.

#### **14. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS AND APPLICATION PACKAGE**

##### **A. Documents Needed to Prepare Applications**

To complete and submit an application, applicants need to review and use three documents: the Request for Applications, the IES Grants.gov Application Submission Guide, and the Application Package.

- The *Request for Applications* for the Special Education Research and Development Center Program (CFDA 84.324C) describes the substantive requirements for a research application.
- ✓ Request for Applications <http://ies.ed.gov/funding/>
- The *IES Grants.gov Application Submission Guide* provides the instructions for completing and submitting the forms.
- ✓ IES Grants.gov Application Submission Guide <http://ies.ed.gov/funding/>

Additional help navigating Grants.gov is available in the Grants.gov User Guide:

- ✓ Grants.gov User Guide [http://www.grants.gov/help/user\\_guides.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/help/user_guides.jsp)
- The *Application Package* provides all of the forms that need to be completed and submitted. The application form approved for use in the competitions specified in this RFA is the government-wide SF424 Research and Related (R&R) Form (OMB Number 4040-0001). The applicant must follow the directions in section C below to download the Application Package from Grants.gov.

##### **B. Date Application Package is Available on Grants.gov**

The application package will be available on <http://www.Grants.gov/> beginning on the following date:

Application Package Available on

August 3, 2009

##### **C. Download Correct Application Package**

###### **a. CFDA number**

Applicants must first search by the CFDA number for each IES Request for Applications *without* the alpha suffix to obtain the correct downloadable Application Package. For the Special Education Research Request for Applications, applicants must search on: **CFDA 84.324**.

###### **b. Special Education Research Application Package**

The Grants.gov search on CFDA 84.324 will yield more than one application package. For the Special Education Research and Development Center Grants Request for Applications, applicants must download the package for the appropriate deadline marked:

**Application Package:**

**CFDA 84.324C-October Special Education Research and Development Center Application Package**

In order for the application to be submitted to the correct grant competition, applicants must download the Application Package that is designated for the grant competition and competition deadline. Using a different Application Package, even if that package is for an Institute competition, will result in the application being submitted to the wrong competition.

### **15. SUBMISSION PROCESS AND DEADLINE**

Applications must be submitted **electronically by 4:30 p.m., Washington, D.C. time** on the application deadline date, using the ED standard forms and the instructions provided on the Grants.gov website.

Potential applicants should check this site for information about the electronic submission procedures that must be followed and the software that will be required.

### **16. APPLICATION CONTENT AND FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS**

#### **A. Overview**

In this section, the Institute provides instructions regarding the content of the (a) project summary/abstract, (b) project narrative, (c) bibliography and references cited, (d) Appendix A, and (e) Appendix B. Instructions for all other documents to be included in the application (e.g., forms, budget narrative, human subjects narrative) are provided in the IES Grants.gov Application Submission Guide.

#### **B. General Format Requirements**

Margin, format, and font size requirements for the Center project summary/abstract, Center project narrative, bibliography and references cited, Appendix A, and Appendix B are described in this section. To ensure that the text is easy for reviewers to read and that all applicants have the same amount of available space in which to describe their projects, applicants must adhere to the type size and format specifications for the entire narrative including footnotes.

##### **a. Page and margin specifications**

For the purposes of applications submitted under this RFA, a "page" is 8.5 in. x 11 in., on one side only, with 1 inch margins at the top, bottom, and both sides.

##### **b. Spacing**

Text must be single spaced in the narrative.

##### **c. Type size (font size)**

Type must conform to the following three requirements:

- The height of the letters must not be smaller than a type size of 12 point.
- Type density, including characters and spaces, must be no more than 15 characters per inch (cpi).  
For proportional spacing, the average for any representative section of text must not exceed 15 cpi.
- Type size must yield no more than 6 lines of type within a vertical inch.

Applicants should check the type size using a standard device for measuring type size, rather than relying on the font selected for a particular word processing/prINTER combination. The type size used must conform to all three requirements. Small type size makes it difficult for reviewers to read the application; consequently, the use of small type will be grounds for the Institute to return the application without peer review.

Adherence to type size and line spacing requirements is necessary so that no applicant will have an unfair advantage, by using small type or by providing more text in their applications. **Note, these requirements apply to the PDF file as submitted.** As a practical matter, applicants who use a 12-

point Times New Roman font without compressing, kerning, condensing or other alterations typically meet these requirements.

Figures, charts, tables, and figure legends may be in a smaller type size but must be readily legible.

**d. Graphs, diagrams, tables**

Applicants must use only black and white in graphs, diagrams, tables, and charts. The application must contain only material that reproduces well when photocopied in black and white.

**C. Project Summary/Abstract**

**a. Submission**

The Center project summary/abstract will be submitted as a .PDF attachment.

**b. Page limitations and format requirements**

The project summary/abstract is limited to 1 single-spaced page and must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements above.

**c. Content**

The Center project summary/abstract should include:

- (1) Title of the proposed Center
- (2) The topic under which the applicant is applying (i.e., Special Education Research and Development Center on Assessment and Accountability)
- (3) Brief description of the focused program of research; and
- (4) A list of the key Center personnel

**D. Project Narrative**

**a. Submission**

The Center project narrative will be submitted as a .PDF attachment.

**b. Page limitations and format requirements**

The Center project narrative is limited to **35 single-spaced pages** for all applicants. The 35-page limit for the project narrative does not include any of the SF 424 forms, the one-page summary/abstract, the appendices, research on human subjects information, bibliography and references cited, biographical sketches of senior/key personnel, narrative budget justification, subaward budget information or certifications and assurances.

Reviewers are able to conduct the highest quality review when applications are concise and easy to read, with pages numbered consecutively using the top or bottom right-hand corner.

**c. Format for citing references in text**

To ensure that all applicants have the same amount of available space in which to describe their Center in the project narrative, applicants should use the author-date style of citation (e.g., James, 2004), such as that described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Ed.* (American Psychological Association, 2001).

**d. Content**

By incorporating the requirements outlined in Part III Requirements of the Proposed Research, the *Center project narrative* provides the majority of the information on which reviewers will evaluate the proposal.

The Center project narrative must include five sections: (a) Significance of the Focused Program of Research, (b) Research Plan for the Focused Program of Research, (c) Other Center Activities, (d)

Management and Institutional Resources, and (e) Personnel. Information to be included in each of these sections is detailed in **Part III Requirements of the Proposed Research**.

## **E. Bibliography and References Cited**

### **a. Submission**

The section will be submitted as a .PDF attachment.

### **b. Page limitations and format requirements**

There are no limitations to the number of pages in the bibliography. The bibliography must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements described in section 16.B. General Format Requirements.

### **c. Content**

Applicants should include complete citations, including the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), titles (e.g., article and journal, chapter and book, book), page numbers, and year of publication for literature cited in the research narrative.

## **F. Appendix A**

### **a. Submission**

Appendix A should be included at the end of the Project Narrative and submitted as part of the same .PDF attachment.

### **b. Page limitations and format requirements**

Appendix A is limited to 15 pages. It must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements described in section 16.B. General Format Requirements.

### **c. Content**

#### **(i) Purpose.**

The purpose of Appendix A is to allow the applicant to include any figures, charts, or tables that supplement the research text, examples of measures to be used in the project, and letters of agreement from partners (e.g., schools) and consultants. These are the only materials that may be included in Appendix A; all other materials will be removed prior to review of the application. Narrative text related to any aspect of the project (e.g., descriptions of the proposed sample, the design of the study, or previous research conducted by the applicant) must be included in the research narrative.

#### **(ii) Letters of agreement.**

Letters of agreement from institutions integral to the proposed work should include enough information to make it clear that the author of the letter understands the nature of the commitment of time, space, and resources to the research project that will be required if the application is funded. The Institute recognizes that some applicants may have more letters of agreement than will be accommodated by the 15-page limit. In such instances, applicants should include the most important letters of agreement and may list the letters of agreement that are not included in the application due to page limitations.

## **G. Appendix B (Optional)**

### **a. Submission**

If applicable, Appendix B should be included at the end of the Center Project Narrative, following Appendix A, and submitted as part of the same .PDF attachment.

**b. Page limitations and format requirements**

The appendix is limited to 10 pages. The Appendix B must adhere to the margin, format, and font size requirements described in section 16.B. General Format Requirements.

**c. Content**

The purpose of Appendix B is to allow applicants to include examples of curriculum materials, assessment items, computer screens, or other materials used in an assessment or as part of an intervention. These are the only materials that may be included in Appendix B; all other materials will be removed prior to review of the application. Narrative text related to the intervention or assessment (e.g., descriptions of research that supports the use of the revised curriculum components, the theoretical rationale for specific types of assessment items, or details regarding the implementation or use of the intervention) must be included in the 35-page center project narrative.

**17. APPLICATION PROCESSING**

Applications must be received by **4:30 p.m., Washington, D.C. time** on the application deadline date listed in the heading of this request for applications. Upon receipt, each application will be reviewed for completeness and for responsiveness to this request for applications. Applications that do not address specific requirements of this request will be returned to the applicants without further consideration.

**18. PEER REVIEW PROCESS**

Applications that are compliant and responsive to this request will be evaluated for scientific and technical merit. Reviews will be conducted in accordance with the review criteria stated below by a panel of scientists who have substantive and methodological expertise appropriate to the program of research and request for applications.

Each application will be assigned to one of the Institute's scientific review panels. At least three primary reviewers will complete written evaluations of the application, identifying strengths and weaknesses related to each of the review criteria. Primary reviewers will independently assign a score for each criterion, as well as an overall score, for each application they review. Based on the overall scores assigned by primary reviewers, an average overall score for each application will be calculated and a preliminary rank order of applications will be prepared before the full peer review panel convenes to complete the review of applications.

The full panel will consider and score only those applications deemed to be the most competitive and to have the highest merit, as reflected by the preliminary rank order. A panel member may nominate for consideration by the full panel any proposal that he or she believes merits full panel review but would not have been included in the full panel meeting based on its preliminary rank order.

**19. REVIEW CRITERIA FOR SCIENTIFIC MERIT**

The purpose of Institute-supported research is to contribute to the solution of education problems and to provide reliable information about the education practices that support learning and improve academic achievement and access to education for all students. Reviewers for all applications will be expected to assess the following aspects of an application in order to judge the likelihood that the proposed research will have a substantial impact on the pursuit of that goal. Information pertinent to each of these criteria is also described in **Part III Requirements of the Proposed Research**.

**A. Significance of the Focused Program of Research**

Does the applicant provide a compelling rationale for the significance of the project as defined in the sections on the significance of the focused program of research?

**B. Research Plan for the Focused Program of Research**

Does the applicant meet the requirements described in the sections detailing the methodological requirements for the focused program of research?

### **C. Plans for Other Center Activities**

Do the content of the examples of proposed supplemental studies and leadership activities and the description of the applicant's capacity to conduct such projects demonstrate that the applicant has the ideas, experience, and capability to successfully carry-out such projects in cooperation with the Institute?

### **D. Management and Institutional Resources**

Do the plans and procedures for the overall management of the Center indicate that the applicant has the capacity to efficiently and successfully complete the proposed research, dissemination, and leadership activities? Does the applicant have the facilities, equipment, supplies, and other resources required to support the proposed activities? Do the commitments of each partner show support for the implementation and success of the proposed Center activities?

### **E. Personnel**

Does the description of the personnel make it apparent that the principal investigator, project director, and other key personnel possess the training and experience and will commit sufficient time to competently implement the proposed research?

## **20. RECEIPT AND START DATE SCHEDULE**

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| <b>A. Letter of Intent Receipt Date:</b>   | <b>August 3, 2009</b>  |
| <b>B. Application Deadline Date:</b>       | <b>October 1, 2009</b> |
| <b>C. Earliest Anticipated Start Date:</b> | <b>July 1, 2010</b>    |

## **21. AWARD DECISIONS**

The following will be considered in making award decisions:

- Scientific merit as determined by peer review
- Responsiveness to the requirements of this request
- Performance and use of funds under a previous Federal award
- Contribution to the overall program of research described in this request
- Availability of funds

## **22. INQUIRIES MAY BE SENT TO:**

### **A. Special Education Research and Development Center on Assessment and Accountability**

Dr. Jacquelyn Buckley  
Institute of Education Sciences  
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20208

Email: [Jacquelyn.Buckley@ed.gov](mailto:Jacquelyn.Buckley@ed.gov)  
Telephone: (202) 219-2130

### **B. Special Education Research and Development Center on Improving Mathematics Instruction for Students with Mathematics Difficulties**

Dr. Celia Rosenquist  
Institute of Education Sciences  
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20208

Email: [Celia.Rosenquist@ed.gov](mailto:Celia.Rosenquist@ed.gov)  
Telephone: (202) 219-2024

Dr. Rob Ochsendorf  
Institute of Education Sciences  
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20208

Email: [Robert.Ochsendorf@ed.gov](mailto:Robert.Ochsendorf@ed.gov)  
Telephone: (202) 219-2234



### **23. PROGRAM AUTHORITY**

20 U.S.C. 9501 et seq., the "Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002," Title I of Public Law 107-279, November 5, 2002. This program is not subject to the intergovernmental review requirements of Executive Order 12372.

### **24. APPLICABLE REGULATIONS**

The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 74, 77, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86 (part 86 applies only to institutions of higher education), 97, 98, and 99. In addition 34 CFR part 75 is applicable, except for the provisions in 34 CFR 75.100, 75.101(b), 75.102, 75.103, 75.105, 75.109(a), 75.200, 75.201, 75.209, 75.210, 75.211, 75.217, 75.219, 75.220, 75.221, 75.222, and 75.230.

### **25. REFERENCES**

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Swanson, L. H., & Jerman, O. (2006). Math disabilities: A selective meta-analysis of the literature. *Review of Education Research*, 76 (2), 249-274.

Tekwe, C.D., Carter, R.L., Ma, C., Algina, J., et al (2004). An empirical comparison of statistical models for value-added assessment of school performance. *Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics*, 29, 11-36.